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SUBJECT: GUATEMALAN "WOMAN OF COURAGE" ASSISTS VICTIMS OF
DOMESTIC ABUSE AND VIOLENCE

REF: A. STATE 16553

[B](#). GUATEMALA 164

[C](#). 08 GUATEMALA 1359

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: On March 4, the Ambassador met with 2009 Guatemalan "Woman of Courage" Norma Cruz to personally congratulate her in advance of her visit to Washington to participate in the Secretary's awards ceremony and related activities. Cruz, co-founder and director of local NGO Survivors Foundation, discussed the daunting challenges facing her organization. She expressed concern over the pervasive climate of impunity, the growing violence against women, and corruption in the judicial sector, but felt hopeful that the new legislation against sexual violence and trafficking in persons would help put an end to the impunity.
End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) During a March 4 courtesy call on the Ambassador, Norma Cruz, one of eight women selected from more than 80 nominees worldwide for the Secretary's 2009 International Women of Courage Award (ref A), thanked the Ambassador on behalf of her organization for the Embassy's nomination (ref C). Cruz said she was very pleased with the recognition as it is not only for her and her team but for all women who are fighting against violence and for women's rights in Guatemala. She expressed concern over the increase in killings of women, which she lamented is part of the sad reality of a country where "one kills another for any reason." She noted that there is violence everywhere, not only in the streets but also in homes, and that while the country is no longer at war the killings have not stopped. She underscored the importance of passing a law regulating arms and ammunition, noting that 90 percent of killings of women involve firearms.

[1](#)3. (U) Cruz thanked the Ambassador for the Embassy's support on recently enacted legislation against sexual violence, exploitation, and trafficking in persons (ref B), which she characterized as an important tool that will greatly help in ending the impunity of violence against women. Impunity, she said, is the key issue, the biggest challenge for the country. She expressed particular concern over the growing power of organized crime in narcotrafficking and human trafficking and its infiltration into the judicial sector. She observed that organized crime is corrupting the judicial sector and changing the panorama of criminal activity.

[1](#)4. (U) The Ambassador highlighted USG support to the GOG on preventive efforts. He noted that the previous week the USG provided training on domestic violence to 60 National Civil Police (PNC) officers at the Police Academy as part of our efforts to help professionalize the Guatemalan police force. He noted that while the majority of the students were women, there was much enthusiasm among the students and that the

training was well received. The seminar focused on various themes related to domestic violence, including machismo, sexual harassment, and techniques on how to interview aggressors.

¶15. (SBU) According to Cruz, corruption among judges is undermining justice. She said that some judges have ties to drug cartels and are bribed to look the other way. She commented that the chief prosecutor of the anti-TIP unit is very competent and diligent but is hampered by suspended sentences handed down by the courts. Likewise, the Attorney General, whom she described as "very honest" and "very responsive," and PNC Director Marlene Blanco face enormous challenges. She indicated that her organization, which has Qchallenges. She indicated that her organization, which has 14 lawyers, recently helped secure the first-ever conviction against a PNC officer for domestic violence and convictions against four other police officers for obstruction of justice in that case.

¶16. (U) Since January 2008, USAID has financed a USD 25,000 sub-contract to the Survivors Foundation under its Rule of Law program to provide legal support to victims of homicide, particularly female victims. With this assistance, the foundation has been able to provide legal services to third-party plaintiffs, including victims and victims' family members, in domestic violence cases, as well as psychological counseling and social services to victims. USAID support to the foundation resulted on February 26 in the conviction and 37-year prison sentence of a PNC officer for the killing of his PNC girlfriend.

¶17. (U) Press coverage of Cruz and the "International Women of Courage" awards ceremony has been extensive and

overwhelmingly positive. Cruz was featured in all the local major print media, including two front-page photos, as well as radio and TV broadcasts, including Voice of America and international network CNN in Spanish and English.

¶18. (U) Comment: Cruz's USG-supported crusade against sexual and domestic violence in defense of Guatemalan women is a testament to the willpower of dedicated individuals to make change despite rampant violence and systemic corruption. As the recipient of the 2009 International Women of Courage Award for Latin America, Cruz publicly highlights the courageous efforts of her organization and the plight of female victims of violence in Guatemala.
McFarland